The Kennedys vs. Manchester

JACKIE SUES

By WILLIAM H. RUDY

Based on reports by Michael Berlin, Arthur Berman (in Los Angeles), Barry Cunningham (in Washington), Rene English (in London), John Garabedian, Arthur Greenspan in (Middletown, Conn.), William Greaves, Kenneth Gross, Pete Hamill, Joseph Kahn, Edward Katcher, Leonard Katz, Murray Kempton, Anthony Prisendorf and Marvin Smilon.

ON AUG. 15, three days after the stormy session in Robert Kennedy's office, there was another meeting in New York during which, according to a Look magazine executive, "all positions became hardened."

Until that point there had been a notable absence of lawyers in the negotiations. From the start the key documents—the memo of understanding, Bobby Kennedy's telegram saying that the Kennedys would place "no obstacle in the way of publication"—had been drawn up informally and were subject to various interpretations.

At this August breakfast meeting in New York, Jacqueline Kennedy was represented for the first time by Simon H. Rifkind. Look's general counsel, John F. Harding, was present along with editor-in-chief William Attwood, who'd been called in because of his friendship with the Kennedy family.

"I dealt with Look's counsel and with Look's principals," Rifkind says. "We complained about serialization and objected to publication on the anniversary date of the assassination."

Look at the time was planning seven articles starting in October. It refused to alter the plans and the meeting broke up with a strong hint of legal action by the Kennedys.

The next day Mrs. Kennedy called Gardner (Mike) Cowles, Look's editorial chairman. At that time they were on a "Mike" and "Jackie" basis.

Cowles recalls that Jackie told him November is "always a difficult time for me and the children and could you postpone serialization?" He said he thought it could be arranged and would ask Cass Canfield if Harper & Row would also delay publication of the book.

Cowles recalls that Jackie "didn't seem to be agitated or terribly upset" but that a few days later she called him and said it was "imperative we have a discussion." On Aug. 24 the family plane, Caroline, was sent to pick up Cowles, Harding and Rifkind. There wasn't much talk on the flight to Cape Cod.

"She greeted us warmly," Cowles says. "She came out to meet me herself at the airport . . . We got to the house in the Kennedy compound. She took me through the house . . . Then she said Sen. Robert Kennedy was also there and she'd sent for him. This was news to me.

"Later, Judge Rifkind said to me the Kennedys hadn't had a chance to confer. Bobby had been down swimming. He said they would like to have a chance to confer. Mr. Harding and I—wandered down to look at the beach."

They looked at the beach—and various Kennedy children playing touch football—for about 40 minutes, Cowles says, before they were summoned to a conference around a brown metal table on the porch.

According to Cowles, Rifkind began by saying it had been decided that it was unwise to serialize the book and Bobby asked flatly that Look "tear up the contract and forget the whole business."

"I said, 'No, that's an unacceptable solution,'" Cowles recalls. "Maybe we could consider fewer instalments, but I'm not prepared to make that decision on the spot. I bought a property with your full approval and I don't see why I should tear up a contract just because you've had a change of heart."

"Jackie said: 'I can't understand. I can't understand why you would go ahead contrary to my wishes.' By this time she was bitter."

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THE SESSION ENDED WITH THE UNDERSTAND-ing that Look would consider reducing the number of instalments and three days later Cowles told Harding to tell the Kennedys they would do this.

Shortly thereafter, Cowles recalls, Dick Goodwin "entered the picture."

"He had a list of things he wanted changed or modified," Cowles recalls. "I wouldn't say the bitterness had passed, but at least when Jackie called to ask us to see Mr. Goodwin she was very polite on the phone. But I had expected to get some word of thanks (for cutting the series), I never got any."

Cowles says he saw Goodwin the same afternoon,

and during the discussion of changes asked if Manchester had been consulted. When Goodwin said "No," Cowles told him "we didn't have any intention of making changes Manchester didn't approve of."

Manchester has recalled that "Dick tried to emasculate the Look galleys . . . He was editing largely for political reasons—material about Bobby and Johnson."

On Sept. 7, the Caroline was sent to take Manchester and Goodwin to Hyannis Port. The author recalls Jackie as "not hostile," and Goodwin remembers it as "a day of swimming, water skiing, all very friendly."

Goodwin was suggesting both changes involving Jackie's personal feelings and changes to make the book fairer to President Johnson. Manchester says: "I always said that I would cut out anything to which Mrs. Kennedy personally objected." He balked at the other.

In the afternoon everyone went on a boat, and Jackie water-skied. A friend of Manchester's says he was told that Jackie plunged into the water and when she didn't immediately come up, "Manchester, who is normally nervous anyway, dove in, thinking that Jackie was drowning.

"When he bobbed to the surface he saw her swimming strongly towards shore," the friend says. "'My God,' he thought, 'she swims as good as Esther Williams.' As Manchester swam towards shore he became weary and wondered if he'd make it. He thought: 'What will happen to the book if I drown?'"

The generally friendly day ended with a curious incident. Manchester had not brought either the Harper's or Look galleys with him, and a phone call was made to his agent, Don Congdon, to send them up that day by plane.

Manchester left in the afternoon and Goodwin waited for the galleys. When the plan arrived Goodwin drove to the airport where, he says, he was told that Manchester had ordered the material flown back to New York.

"That's when they really blew their stacks," a friend says. "Jackie, of course, was furious."

Other sources, however, say two packages were sent back, the Look galleys winding up with Congdon and the Harper's manuscript in Robert Kennedy's office where it was kept for two weeks, although the publishers asked for its return. It is not said who ordered the packages returned.

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ON OCT. 10, MANCHESTER HAD HIS LAST MEET-ing with Bobby. He and Goodwin were invited to the Senator's Hickory Hill estate in Virginia. Goodwin remembers it as "a very friendly day—dinner with Ethel and the kids."

Manchester recalls it as chilly, in more ways than one, but adds that "Bobby being Bobby, he had to put on swimming trunks and go swimming."

Manchester recalls the pool conversation with Bobby as disconcerting—"his head was under water most of the time"—but says that Bobby assured him there would be no lawsuit.

"'For one thing, it would be intolerable to have Jackie a witness in a trial,'" he quotes Kennedy as saying. "'For another, I'd be in the business of suppressing a book. I can't win that kind of fight.'"

"What Manchester neglects to add," Kennedy says now, "was that at the end of the talk he agreed to make the changes we were talking about."

Also in October there was a strategy meeting of Kennedy advisers in New York. They decided a lawsuit was the last resort. The Kennedy people believe the other side got wind of this decision and their position stiffened on changes.

On Oct. 26, Manchester sent the Harper's galleys to Goodwin for changes and told him he must have them back in 15 days—by Nov. 10.

Goodwin was in Italy and says he knew of no deadline. Manchester, meanwhile, heard nothing and wrote Goodwin that in the absence of suggestions he assumed there weren't any. He prepared to leave for England to work on his Krupp book.

On the morning of Nov. 16, the day he was to sail, Manchester was conferring with Evan Thomas in Look's suite in the Berkshire Hotel. Bobby Kennedy knocked on the door and was told by a third man they weren't there.

"If they don't want to see us, just tell us that," Kennedy is quoted as saying. The man returned with word: "They just don't want to see you." The Senator and his companion went around the corner to the Waldorf and sat on the lobby stairs.

"Well, what do we do now?," Bobby asked.

On Nov. 22, Mike Land of Look flew to London to talk with Manchester about changes in eight galleys. All but one were made, he recalls, and the other was "pointless."

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GOODWIN WAS MAKING EVEN MORE CHANGES over the Thanksgiving weekend and on Nov. 29, Cass Canfield, executive chairman of Harper & Row, and editorial chairman Evan Thomas flew to London to see Manchester. They took with them a letter from Jackie requesting the author to make more changes—some 27 in all. A meeting had been set up for Nov. 30 in the office of A. D. Peters, the dean of British literary agents.

Peters recalls that Canfield handed Manchester a "Dear Bill" letter from Mrs. Kennedy and handed over galleys heavily marked in red ink. Peters describes Manchester as looking at them with "utter astonishment."

"The two Harper's men regarded him anxiously," the agent remembers. "Finally Manchester said: 'You surely don't expect me to discuss this with you now? There's a hell of a lot more here than I expected. There's hours of work here.'"

They met again at 3 p.m. and Manchester was described as "in a state of shocked dismay, and angry as well." Canfield told him he had to fly back at 4:30 p.m.

"Well, it's simple," Manchester is quoted as saying. "I've altered all I intend to alter."

The Harper's editors took the proofs, Peters says, and saw that Manchester had refused to accept more than half the changes.

"Look, Bill, this is Mrs. Kennedy asking for these corrections. You must go along with her," Thomas is quoted as saying.

"A lot of these cuts are not personal, they're political, and anyone can see it," Manchester answered.

Canfield and Thomas asked the author to drive with them to the airport and during the trip their discussion became an argument that continued right up to Customs, Peters says. At the last minute Thomas decided to stay over and try to get more cuts.

Manchester agreed to work through the night but the next morning over breakfast—"hardly a happy meal"—said he had made "two or three more cuts and that's the limit."

"It had been a very unhappy occasion and they were all feeling distressed and tense," Peters remembers.

Manchester's recollection is that some 17 of the 27 changes requested in London were made. He says he was told the changes involved Mrs. Kennedy and "the feelings of her children."

"The first six pages with paper clips on them were about Lyndon Johnson's political career," he adds. "That involved the feelings of her children?"

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CANFIELD RETURNED TO NEW YORK AND, AC-cording to one person close to the negotiations, assured Jackie that everything would turn out all right. She, in turn, wrote Cowles on Dec. 2 indicating that she had given up thoughts of a lawsuit because it would be bad for all concerned.

This was a Friday, but during the following week she apparently had second thoughts. There were more talks with Look, and with Harper's, and on the weekend of Dec. 11, Jackie instructed Rifkind to file suit.

Bobby Kennedy apparently hadn't been told of the decision, a Washington newspaperman reported the Senator "blanched" when he got the word by phone. But the family closed ranks, Bobby began calling the shots, and eventually the out-of-court settlement was reached, although it really pleased no one.

LAST OF SIX ARTICLES.